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Balancing Your Emotional Budget

A radio discussion over WGN and the Mutual Broadcasting System

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THE REVIEWING STAND is a weekly radio forum presented by Northwestern University. The program was first broadcast by Station WGN, Chicago, October 14, 1934. It has been on the air continuously since that time, originating in the WGN studios, and, since 1935, carried by the stations of the Mutual Broadcasting System. THE REVIEWING STAND presents members of the Northwestern University faculty and distinguished guests from business, government, education, and the press in round table discussions of contemporary problems—the questions that are in the news. The program is under the direction of James H. McBurney, Dean of the School of Speech, Northwestern University; Miss Myrtle Stahl, Director of Educational Programs, WGN, Chicago; R. E. Buchanan, Director of Radio, Northwestern University; Mrs. Kathryn Johnson, Assistant to the Director; Mrs. Mary Clark, Secretarial Chief.

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Balancing Your Emotional Budget

MR. BUCHANAN: How can you balance your emotional budget?

DR. WILSON: I think we *do* balance our emotional budget, but in a panicky sort of way. And we get into each other's hair in the process.

MR. YOUNG: We balance our emotional budget in many ways, through sports, in creative art, retreat to religion, use of liquor, gambling, and other ways.

MR. BERG: Here's a good way: Stop thinking only about your problem and start thinking of ways to solve it.

MR. BUCHANAN: Worry . . . tension . . . anxiety. These three seem to be a large part of our lives in the speedy tempo of American living today. Such mental and emotional strain is bound to create problems—problems which loom more and more important.

Wilson, you have said that in balancing our emotional budgets we often get in each other's hair. Do you mean that in this balancing process we create another problem by solving one?

DR. WILSON: There is a lot of that. I think that solitary confinement in jail, for example, is one of the most severe punishments for any human being. Each one of us needs to live in contact with other human beings, and that is where the rub comes. We can't live *without* other people, and sometimes we can't live *with* them.

Balancing Emotional Budget Varies

MR. BUCHANAN: Young, you have mentioned half a dozen means of balancing your emotional budget. Now, I know that you were at the race track yesterday, so I might put you on the spot by asking if that was a step in balancing your emotional budget.

MR. YOUNG: I balanced my emotional budget by watching the horses, but it caused some imbalance in my financial budget when I lost money on the seventh race. There are a variety of ways of balancing the emotional budget, some more valid than others.

MR. BUCHANAN: Well, Berg, you have indicated that we might look toward solutions of a problem rather than worrying about the fact that we have that problem. Isn't that a lot easier to say than to do?

MR. BERG: Yes, it is, but we tend to defer action on a problem and go 'round and 'round a sort of "emotional mulberry bush." Instead of doing that we should evaluate the possible ways of solving a problem. Even seemingly insoluble problems have a way out. For example, more than one great poem, more than one great work of music has been written, and more than one great man has reached the top of an executive ladder as the result of something like a broken heart or even the death of a loved one.

MR. BUCHANAN: These emotional imbalances, if we can call them that, seem to be rather widespread today. Is there any indication that they are increasing or decreasing with our mode of living, Berg?

MR. BERG: Yes, to some extent. Part of the difficulty is all the little paper work we have to do, the various difficulties we run into. For example, trouble in one budget can lead to trouble in another budget. Trouble with our emotional budget is often reflected in trouble with our financial budget.

We can't concentrate on mental tasks. The housewife, for example, if her emotional budget is imbalanced, may add up her grocery bill wrong and, bang, there goes her financial budget!

Even a professor may have an imbalanced emotional budget occasionally. You have heard of the professor who kissed the door and slammed his wife, haven't you?

DR. WILSON: "Even professors?" Surely it is *especially* professors. (Laughter.)

MR. BUCHANAN: A special case of emotional imbalance? (Laughter.)

MR. YOUNG: I wouldn't say that this is particularly confined to professors. I think we are a little self-conscious about that. It seems to me the whole strain of modern living has produced a strong sense of isolation. You get more and more people crowded into cities, and the tempo of our life, as you said a while ago, Buchanan, produces a lot of strain. I think we are victims of a certain social situation at present.

DR. WILSON: I feel, Young, that we are sometimes inclined to be sorry for ourselves a bit too easily. For example, the expectation of life about a hundred years ago was about half what it is now. The first time I ever came across a phrase about the speed of modern life was in an article in the *London Times*, about 1850. They were complaining about hansom cabs rushing across the streets and how terrible it was. So I think, in a way, there must have been corresponding worries even then.

MR. YOUNG: I don't doubt there were worries of various kinds, but suppose the span of life then was only half what it is now, we have twice as long to worry about things today. (Laughter.)

All Groups Face Problem

MR. BUCHANAN: There seems to be no special solution to that. Is this imbalancing of emotions limited to any special group, Young? Would you say that any one suffers more than the others?

MR. YOUNG: No, whatever we may think about a particular historical setting, we find this problem of imbalance, as we call it here, confined to no particular class or group. It is found among children; it is found among adults; it is found in all economic and social classes.

MR. BERG: Some people are responsive to these pressures and get imbalances more frequently than others.

DR. WILSON: I would say that children are less able, perhaps, to take certain steps about the problems that hit them; on the other hand they have very real capacity for dealing with things that we tend to lose when we grow up.

One of the things I remember seeing in one group of children after a bombing raid in London was a game that had a very real value. One child would say, "Now, I'll be the bomb," and to the others, "You be frightened." And then one of the others would say, "I'll be the bomb, and you be frightened." They were playing over and over again something that upset them, thus assimilating it by degrees. That kind of play is not quite so easy for adults.

MR. YOUNG: That is quite true. There are other cases in our own country of that. We know, for example, from studies of children's groups in nursery schools, that children often get rid of their problems by fighting among themselves, even when they are the best of friends. In fact, there is a high

correlation between the degree of friendliness and fighting in some of these groups. With adults we are loaded down, it seems to me, with a lot of unnecessary worries that come out of our consciences and training. We hate to offend people. In this connection I have often thought about Eugene O'Neill's play, *Strange Interlude*. What kind of world would it be if we did talk to each other a little more frankly and bluntly than we do when we feel we have to cover up even our mild aggressions?

MR. BERG: You don't encourage fighting by adults? I am getting a little worried.

MR. YOUNG: I don't know about the fighting. It goes on at different levels, not only with adults but with teen-agers as well. No, it is a question partly of sublimation of certain kinds of aggressions and activities. I don't know that I would encourage fighting as an overt behavior, but certainly you cannot get away from the problem of hostility as one way out of this problem of emotional imbalance.

MR. BUCHANAN: What would you encourage as a means for adults to balance their emotional budgets?

MR. YOUNG: We *do* have gambling; we *do* have the use of drugs; we *do* have a lot of other methods to which many people strongly object. I think the problem here is that balancing the emotional budget sometimes costs a great deal more than we anticipate in the beginning. There is here surely a problem from the moral and ethical point of view which must be taken into account.

MR. BUCHANAN: You mean in the cost beyond financial?

MR. YOUNG: I mean that in the end you don't balance your budget. You are in a worse situation than before.

What Is Good for People?

MR. BUCHANAN: How do we tell what is good for people, then?

MR. YOUNG: I don't know. It seems to me that it is difficult for one person to try to tell another person what to do. It is probably one of the worst things you can do to lay down certain patterns for other people. This is what we call a projection mechanism, and it is familiar to all of us.

DR. WILSON: I think it is very easy for any of us to be anxious and sometimes made angry by the behavior of other people. For example, there are a lot of people, I think, who don't seem to accept what is the most widely-held psychological view of heavy drinking—that it is a symptom of a severe psychological imbalance or bankruptcy and that it is the only technique this particular person seems to be able to use.

The point, in a way, is like the English tavern. It is a kind of a first aid or a casualty clearing station, where people go to get some kind of help for their various wounds. It differs from other hospitals in that it doesn't clear its severely wounded who hang on cheek by jowl with other wounded.

MR. YOUNG: There are other kinds of outlets, of course. There is the scapegoat mechanism which has been much discussed in our present concern with treatment of minority peoples. Certainly the scapegoat provides an object upon which we can heap a good deal of our anxieties and frustrations and aggressions. I don't know how far you can correct such scapegoating and prejudice because of the terrific amount of satisfaction that it gives people.

MR. BUCHANAN: I assume that this would fit, then, with Wilson's

statement that one problem may lead to another.

DR. WILSON: I don't think I suffer from this prejudice problem in the same form as you. One of the things I find about myself is that an attack against my personal scapegoating is deeply resented because I then face the problem of finding something else to dislike or hate. Most of us, I think, are really like that.

MR. BUCHANAN: Do we really need, then, Berg, some outlet for hate as an emotion, some sort of a scapegoat?

MR. BERG: Yes, very definitely we need outlets. However, we need to keep in mind also that the needs and values of individuals vary. Some individuals place a very high value on money. Others will place a very high value on something like fine clothing. So they get into difficulties by spending all their money on fine clothing. The other one gets into difficulties because he over-values money and won't spend it. So anything that is done must be kept in terms of what the individual values.

DR. WILSON: There is a widespread tendency for nearly all of us—perhaps some people in particular—to want to do things either *to* or *for* other people without a full regard of the needs of these other people. For example—I speak for my own country—one of the major problems of social work is the extent to which it is shot through and through with a passion for doing things *to* people or *for* people. That particular passion has its roots in some kind of uneasiness about the social contribution someone is making and an attempt to balance his budget by exploiting the need of others.

'Start Where You Are'

MR. YOUNG: That's a good illustration of the point you made earlier: In balancing our own budget, we involve other people and sometimes we complicate the situation thereby. It raises a nice question of how you get people to grow and to develop on their own and from their own base. You can't start from where *you* are if you are doing the reforming; you must start from the base of the people with whom you deal. And, as you say, this is an extremely difficult thing to get over to the ordinary person who is concerned with social reform.

MR. BERG: You know, Young, your comment is a perfectly objective, professional approach for a psychologist. Just recently I was reading a definition of a psychologist which I can't resist bringing in here. "The psychologist is a person who, when a shapely and beautiful girl enters the room, watches everybody else." (Laughter.)

DR. WILSON: I would add, "As well." (Laughter.)

MR. BERG: That is part of the difficulty of being perfectly objective—when you can't be that way.

We recognize, for example, this sort of situation. A fraternal organization gave a circus for underprivileged children during the depression, and the people who gave this circus spent a lot of money and a lot of time trying to make these youngsters happy. Then they were terribly shocked and hurt because the recipients of their charity complained about the seats, complained about the quality of lemonade, etc.

MR. BUCHANAN: I suppose that when something is being done for your own good, it isn't nearly so enjoyable as when you are doing it because you want to do it.

I would like to know, too, about the extent of emotional imbalance. We have said it isn't limited to any group, but does that mean that everyone, Wilson, has a problem in some form?

MR. WILSON: I should say that to have problems is universal. I think that probably every human being has plenty of opportunity to learn about the reality of emotional stress. We don't get enough chance to learn from each other the different techniques of balancing emotional budgets.

To go off into a field where there is no one here to fight back—so perhaps it is not quite fair—I feel that education in England is confused with instruction, and education might with advantage be preoccupied more with learning how to live with other people and learning different ways of balancing emotional budgets.

MR. YOUNG: I think you shouldn't feel any particular conscience about the situation in Britain. All too frequently in our country the teacher is more concerned with getting to page 116 in the arithmetic book than with getting the child well-adjusted to his group and to himself, for that matter.

DR. WILSON: Of course, one of the reasons for that—I must stick to my own country—is that the teachers are faced with parents who want the three R's taught. They feel that, if the teachers teach anything else, they are wasting time and money.

MR. YOUNG: It is much the same in this country, Wilson. The parents want the child to have high marks in school and be promoted at the expected times. The amount of emotional balance the parents get out of the success of Johnny and Willie in school is enormous. It may be plenty tough on the youngsters, but the parents get something out of it.

MR. BERG: The teacher or parent can say, "He is on page 167," but they can't tell how well adjusted the child is socially. They get a little greater feeling of security from an obvious fact.

Education of Children Is Vital

DR. WILSON: I believe that until children have an opportunity of learning in the family, in the school, and in the community, a whole variety of ways of living with other people, they will be forced as adults back into these inadequate ways of rapidly balancing the budget we have been talking about.

MR. YOUNG: Yes, but do you have any suggestions, Wilson, as to how the school, or the community, or whatever agency can somehow influence the home and the family to train the children to live more adequately with a variety of situations?

DR. WILSON: It is a long job, and a very slow one for the reason you mention—you can't start easily with any one part of that situation.

MR. YOUNG: The schools in this country reflect the community rather than the other way around, and I think it is hard for the school to make its impact on the home.

DR. WILSON: Is it indelicate to suggest that universities have a part to play in this particular matter? (Laughter.)

MR. YOUNG: They might have a part to play. I don't think they have played much part yet.

MR. BUCHANAN: What about educating the adults who have already grown up? You have mentioned, Young, educating emotions. How is that possible?

MR. YOUNG: It is difficult to start as an adult. And here, I think the school can and does do something. I think we have made progress—despite our critical attitude in the last few minutes—in teaching children creative art and creative play. We have gained a good deal. Also I have seen the capacity to take up art and music developed in older persons.

DR. WILSON: One of the things you can see—again in England—is the development of the so-called adult education movement. It has been rapidly developed in some directions but suffers from one terrific problem. The people who are interested in going out to discussions seem basically different from those of the organization catering to them. In fact, the phrase, *adult education*, conveys to many people a sense of patronage and something imposed. This is poison from the point of view of education.

MR. YOUNG: Is that as true of the lower classes?

DR. WILSON: I think it is particularly true of the lower classes. They can feel that patronage very easily.

MR. BERG: Above all, I think doing something about emotional crises is important. One example concerns an American who married a Scotch nobleman, Lady MacRobert of Scotland. During the war she lost two of her sons in the battle for Britain. Very close together were these tragic losses. Now, of course, it seems offhand to be almost impossible to adjust to a situation like that. But she did. She happened to be a woman of considerable means, and she took most of her wealth to buy a bomber. And she named it, and therein, I think, lies a very important lesson. She called it *MacRobert's Reply*. I might add that she was a woman of means and could do that, but on the other hand, she inspired many thousands of other people who didn't have her means to do the same thing and thus gain a balancing of the emotional budget.

Short and Long Run Effects

DR. WILSON: She probably balanced the budget immediately by that action, but later on she would have to take other actions of a more constructive character.

MR. BERG: Yes, of course.

MR. YOUNG: I think that is an extremely important point, and I think this brings us back once more to the fact that all methods of balancing the budget are not equally valid. We want to develop some kinds of methods which in the long run, rather than the short run will pay off.

DR. WILSON: The conditions of life for so many people in England are such that they have little or no interest in what they do. In consequence, in their time off, when they come out of the factory, out of the home in the case of a housewife who is having a rough time, they feel they have so many hours in which they *must* balance their budget. So they seek exciting but rather unsatisfying activities. They gamble or they drink or they go to the movies and sit passively watching somebody else's daydreams rather than doing something constructive. It isn't that they don't want to do more constructive things. I think the state of boredom and fatigue and frustration does not allow them to take up more satisfying and more valid techniques.

MR. BERG: Would you recommend that they try active participation in something?

DR. WILSON: I think they do; but I think the thing that would be help-

ful would be the availability of opportunities patiently left around so that one time when they are less bored and less angry at the world they will have a shot at something more constructive. They may well find—to their surprise—there is more satisfaction in it.

MR. YOUNG: Is there any way for the community to help mobilize these resources, to facilitate these improvements?

DR. WILSON: Wherever there is an organization that wants to lend a hand in the development of the community life, I would like to see people from that organization begin by meeting with those people they want to help and fully discussing the situation with them.

MR. YOUNG: That's very important. Of course, in the best agencies that is being done more and more.

DR. WILSON: Commercial organizations do that, it seems to me. They watch the customer all the time and get a very good result. I was impressed with a baseball match the other day. I concluded that what was happening on the field, the solemn part, the game, was less important than it might appear. I was very impressed by the qualities of ritual, by the behavior of the audience, how you follow the ball down the net behind home plate. This 7th inning stretch—quite unexpected by me—was like my embarrassment as a child going to the English Church service, having to bob up and down for unexplained reasons.

MR. YOUNG: For a Presbyterian that would be hard. (Laughter.)

DR. WILSON: There was some great satisfaction in doing these things together in a crowd, which doesn't do harm to anybody.

Make Sure Information Is Accurate

MR. BERG: To help its members the community can make sure the information the individual gets is accurate. So often a problem arises only because of misinformation. For example, a very distraught woman came into my office a year or so ago. In a moment she broke into tears and explained that her sister was placed in a mental hospital. When I talked to this woman a little longer she said she was expecting to go crazy herself. That is the way she put it. She expected to be insane within a year or two. Now it so happens that there was no more likelihood that she would go insane than I would. Of course I couldn't tell her that or I wouldn't reassure her, you see. (Laughter.) At any rate, by giving her the correct information, the facts, it straightened out that problem.

MR. YOUNG: I don't think that information alone is the answer. I don't disagree with your illustration or the point, Berg, but it seems to me that we must recognize that this information must be tied into some kind of action program, which will be emotionally satisfying to the people.

MR. BERG: Yes, indeed.

DR. WILSON: I think one of the most constructive ideas in a sense is to get our aspirations to a reasonable level. This business about reaching for the stars is all very well for some people, but I think people generally aspire much too high.

MR. YOUNG: We have a tough time in this country in that we tend to stress the high level of aspiration to get ahead. It leaves people with a great many anxieties and frustrations.

MR. BUCHANAN: What about an individual solution? Is there anything an individual can do immediately if he has a problem?

MR. BERG: He can talk out and write out the situation. When an individual sits down and writes out his problem, the trivial nature of his problem, of his worry, becomes apparent.

DR. WILSON: Don't be too proud to try to share it with somebody else.

MR. BUCHANAN: You mean just talking the problem out is helpful?

DR. WILSON: That's right, yes.

MR. BUCHANAN: Why should it be that way?

DR. WILSON: This business about sharing emotions goes back to the beginning of our discussion. We are social animals: we need other people.

MR. BUCHANAN: Just realization that someone else may have a similar problem is of some help?

DR. WILSON: It has a very astonishing effect, because you realize that you, alone, have not been singled out for trouble in this world.

MR. BERG: Very often if you try to understand the other person, you may help yourself. Instead of concentrating on what he has done to you, you should try to understand why the individual who caused the trouble acted as he did. Often the solution becomes quite clear then.

DR. WILSON: If we could look on the behavior of other people as attempts on their part to balance their emotional budgets, it makes life easier for everybody.

MR. BUCHANAN: These approaches to this problem of tension and worry, which all of us seem to face in this modern life, I believe, offer a sound basis for our thinking in such situations.

If we realize the importance of well-balanced and fruitful living, we might be able to get around some, if not all, the problems which arise from these anxieties and our inability to relax.



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Suggested Readings

Compiled by Mrs. Laura Joost,
Deering Library,



CANER, GEORGE COLKET. *It's Law You Take It.* New York, Coward-McCann, 1946.

Especially helpful for young people on how to cultivate desirable attitudes to develop good adjustments.

DUNBAR, HELEN FLANDERS. *Mind and Body: Psychosomatic Medicine.* New York, Random House, 1947.

Based on the theory that pain may have a mental source as well as physical.

DUNLAP, KNIGHT. *Personal Adjustment.* New York, McGraw, 1946.

Will help one to understand the processes of learning, on habits, mental disorders, sexual and marital adjustments, and the principles of psychoanalysis.

EISENBERG, PHILIP. *Why We Act As We Do.* New York, Knopf, 1947.

A discussion of some of the basic discoveries concerning human behavior and the forces which influence our actions.

HALLIDAY, JAMES L. *Psychosocial Medicine—A Study of a Sick Society.* New York, Norton, 1948.

Presents important reasons for emotional distress among people in the modern age.

LAPHAM, ROGER FULMER. *It's In Your Power.* New York, Essential Books, 1947.

A New York physician takes a commonsense approach to such subjects as: the common cold, intelligent use of alcohol and tobacco, exercise, insomnia, fear, sex, marriage and religion.

LIEBMAN, JOSHUA LOTH. *Peace of Mind.* New York, Simon and Schuster, 1946.

A discussion of our ability to change and improve ourselves.

YOUNG, KIMBALL. *Personality and Problems of Adjustment.* New York, Crofts, 1940.

Discusses the physiological and social foundations of personality, the various problems of personal adjustment, and the possibility of integration through religion and art.

Hygeia. 26:166-69+, March, '48. "Psychosomatics, a New Understanding of Human Ills." JAMES A. BRUSSEL.

This discussion shows that often the root of a serious illness lies in some old emotional upset. Before the body can be cured, the emotional strain must be lifted.

Hygeia. 24:508-9, July, '46. "Fatigue." J. L. NORRIS.

The writer suggests recreation as one means of relieving tension caused by fatigue.

Independent Woman. 27:119-20, April, '48. "Harness Your Frustrations." J. G. BENGEL.

Mental Hygiene. 30:45-58, Oct., '46. "Women and Modern Stress." W. OVERHOLSER.

With especial reference to women, this article gives a description of types of stress and suggests remedies for their relief.

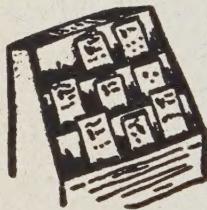
Parents Magazine. 22:26+, May, '47. "Health Is What You Make It." C. J. FOSTER.

Suggestions to parents on the emotional training of children based on the fact that love and security are the best psychosomatic medicine.

Readers' Digest. 52:93-4, May, '48. "Ganging Up On Personal Problems." E. M. STERN.

Readers' Digest. 51:9-13, July, '47. "How to Keep Out of the Psychiatrist's Hands." H. E. FOSDICK.

Five "ways of life" likely to produce a healthy emotional life.



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